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Author: Anna Stwora

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Anna STWORA
(Uniwersytet Śląski)

AMERICAN IDENTITY ENVELOPED IN WORDS

Abstract

This article aims at presenting presidential rhetoric in which the myth of the American Dream is employed in order to influence national identity. It provides an overall description of the theme of the American Dream from the standpoint of sociolinguistics and psycholinguistics, basing on discretionally selected inaugural addresses delivered by four Presidents of the United States, with particular emphasis placed on the process of moulding individual identity through the construction and maintenance of cognitive and thought patterns. The research questions posed are intended to prove that the American Dream may be perceived as an instrument of psycholinguistic manipulation which can be the source of ideological and social pressure.

Keywords: rhetoric, the American Dream, national identity, manipulation, thought pattern.

Introduction

It is an axiom that the strength of every political establishment is contingent on the extent of its agency of social control exerted over the people, and the most effective means for maintaining influence is making them firmly believe in the established order. Little do we realise that political leaders sanction their decisions through culture, tradition, and ideology which underlie human belief systems; notwithstanding, it is imperative to develop the awareness of the crucial role that linguistic patterns play in culture, herein considered in the light of American political rhetoric.

The topic of the following article is strictly connected with cognitive mapping of spaces within the field of sociolinguistics, for it deals with the impact of language patterns and clichés on human perception, especially with the creation of national identity by means of rhetorical devices. For the purpose of this research, the speeches delivered during the presidential inaugurations by John F. Kennedy, Jimmy Carter, William J. Clinton, and Barack Obama have been analysed in order to show how the great idea of the American Dream is used in presidential rhetoric, as

well as to present how this myth is structured by the American presidents to appeal to the whole nation and create the sense of Americanness in their audience.

1. The power of rhetoric

To begin with, it must be stated that language is not a neutral means of communication, but rather a collection of sociologically grounded practices.¹ It plays a crucial role in social interaction and helps to build a more inclusive community because of its function as a means of transmission of socio-cultural values² and meanings. Thus, language cannot be regarded as an end in itself but rather as a tool, since it is important because of its uses. It should be examined from the standpoint of the function performed, as posited by Jakobson who claimed that the emphasis is to be placed on the creative power of language, as well as on various kinds of communicative behaviour, showing that each linguistic form chosen serves a defined communicational purpose.

The art of practical language use, that is, rhetoric, enables the speaker to create not only memorable phrases and sentences, but also his own vision of the world presented to the hearer. Its power is a fact to be reckoned with, for rhetoric organises human knowledge by means of convincing arguments which influence people's worldview, as well as the way they perceive their roles in the community. Therefore, the knowledge of how communication patterns work and how linguistic techniques may be used is vital to understanding the process of propagation of ideas in public communication, i.e. in the act of formal speaking in public known as oratory. Defined in terms of the addressor's nested intention and planned effect, the speech act can be described as a goal-oriented device by means of which people perform actions. "Speech acts are seen as acts of projection,"³ which means that the orator always aims to project his opinions, views, and attitudes so as to share them with others via utterances produced. His lexical choices, viewed at the level of their meaning encoded in language, construct both the purpose of the discourse and its reception by the audience.

A competent speaker of a language makes it an instrument in his hands thanks to his oratory abilities, which consist of something more than just uttering complex phrases that carry some meaning; the richness of vocabulary is not the only element required – some profound knowledge of cultural patterns, human psyche, and logical organisation of discourse should also be included. The power is located in the

¹ L.M. Ahearn, *Antropologia lingwistyczna: wprowadzenie*. Trans. W. Usakiewicz (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2013), p. 19.

² D. Daoust, "Language Planning and Language Reform" in: *The Handbook of Sociolinguistics*, ed. F. Coulmas (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1997), p. 436.

³ A. Tabouret-Keller, "Language and Identity" in: *The Handbook of Sociolinguistics*, ed. F. Coulmas (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1997), p. 323.

words themselves and between the verses, making it possible for language to label the surrounding world and shape human perception of what is described, often forming a highly stereotyped, yet compelling picture.

2. Building the “social network” from the Dream’s tenets

The same mechanism operates within the rhetoric of the American Dream, which benefits from the system of culturally and lexically implied concepts with the aim of influencing, unifying, and also managing the society due to formation of a congruent mental picture of Americanness as the mainstream psychological current flowing through the entire nation. That is why this article will centre on what the speaker can accomplish ‘in’ saying something about the American Dream as well as on its impact on the American people. Basing on the research into the selected inaugural addresses, the author managed to trace rhetorical themes and constructions pertinent to the theme of the American Dream and American national identity. The rhetorical framework for producing these speeches falls into three divisions concerning building the sense of togetherness, stirring emotions, and convincing to follow the tenets of the Dream, thus prompting action on the part of the audience.

The great American myth makes people welcome the vision of the land of “Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness”⁴ with alacrity. It propagates the prospect of an onward march of progress founded on *The Declaration of Independence* which guarantees a set of inalienable human rights to be held by the American nation, as well as encourages the people to participate in the community, thus compelling them to form the sense of belongingness to a bigger structure. Cognisant of the fact that common behavioural standards and shared ideals fulfil a primary function in both the organisation of society and building the sense of belongingness, political leaders resort to socio-cultural themes shared within the society. The orators’ immense creative power convinces the recipients of the message to enter the “social network”⁵ and every utterance they produce results in a change in the actions or feelings of the audience, which provides support for the assertion that language plays a central role in defining our reality, forming social relations, and even in structuring human sense of belongingness or identity.

The American nation is therefore persuaded through the presidents’ command of rhetoric, through the way they envelope the American Dream in words. Following this line of reasoning, the discourse of leadership serves as an instrument of ideological proclamation that seminally shapes the popular mind and

⁴ G. Hocmard, ed., *The American Dream: Advanced Readings in English. With Reading Strategies by Lyn McLean* (London: Longman, 1982), p. 19.

⁵ R.B. Le Page, “The Evolution of a Sociolinguistic Theory of Language” in: *The Handbook of Sociolinguistics*, ed. F. Coulmas (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1997), p. 26.

continues to resonate with the public, building its sense of identity. Accordingly, various administrations in power avail themselves of the notion and the tenets of the American Dream, and use them as a rhetorical device with the aim of strengthening their messages and sanctioning their actions. “Multiple presidents have asked the American people to think of their common bonds,”⁶ of their shared cultural and spiritual origins, thus encouraging them to cement social ties of togetherness. The following quotations from Clinton and Obama, respectively, provide some vivid examples of a legacy-laden description of the nation’s forebears, their achievements and values they cherished:

The promise of America was born in the 18th century out of the bold conviction that we are all created equal. It was extended and preserved in the 19th century, when our Nation spread across the continent, saved the Union, and abolished the awful scourge of slavery.

The following portrayal of the American ancestors provided by Obama also appeals to the recipients’ imagination, making them feel more united due to shared history:

For us, they packed up their few worldly possessions and travelled across oceans in search of a new life. For us, they toiled in sweatshops and settled the West, endured the lash of the whip, and plowed the hard Earth. For us, they fought and died in places like Concord and Gettysburg, Normandy and Khe Sanh. [...] We are the keepers of this legacy.

Presidents stress the importance of the cooperative approach, stimulating the public – asking them, collectively and individually, to become a part of a great historic effort that shall improve the standard of living for all men and women in the country. It seems suitable to cite Kennedy’s memorable quote here:

And so, my fellow Americans: ask not what your country can do for you – ask what you can do for your country. My fellow citizens of the world: ask not what America will do for you, but what together we can do for the freedom of man.

When it comes to promoting the spirit of togetherness, President Carter says:

Let us create together a new national spirit of unity and trust. [...] Let us learn together and laugh together and work together and pray together, confident that in the end we will triumph together in the right.

Clinton echoes in his inaugural address:

Great rewards will come to those who can live together, learn together, work together, forge new ties that bind together.

What is more, the leaders of the nation refer to the people as *fellow citizens* so as to emphasise the fact that they are in the same position, that they are involved in

⁶ V.B. Beasley, *You, the People: American National Identity in Presidential Rhetoric*. Texas A&M University Press, 2011. Google Books.
<https://books.google.pl/books?id=hfgjuBKSdf8C&pg=PP6&dpq=PP6&dq=Beasley,+Vanessa.+2004.You+the+People:+American+National+Identity+in+Presidential+Rhetoric&source=bl&ots=CguEiWQyuM&sig=XOh9v7JmrQuSmQcFs8SvnyKqKvE&hl=pl&sa=X&ei=RX7zVIyTMYXTygO854KABQ&ved=0CEcQ6AEwBQ#v=onepage&q&f=false> (Nov 17, 2015), p. 7.

the same activities, and live similar lives. They are trying to instil this particular attitude into the minds of the people, arguing that being either united or divided as a community equals success or failure, action or inability. President Kennedy posits that the American people can succeed only when united and thus appeals to his audience:

Let both sides explore what problems unite us instead of belabouring those problems which divide us.

The words spoken by Clinton are in a similar vein, though he also mentions the Founding Fathers and the idea of democracy that permeates American culture:

We – the American people – we are the solution. Our Founders understood that well and gave us a democracy strong enough to endure for centuries, flexible enough to face our common challenges and advance our common dreams in each new day.

Likewise, Obama claims:

Our Founding Fathers, faced with perils that we can scarcely imagine, drafted a charter to assure the rule of law and the rights of man, a charter expanded by the blood of generations. Those ideals still light the world [...].

What he means are the ideals forming the central components of American value system, legacy, and the American Dream itself. Predicated on the principles of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, the Dream promises democracy, equality, and contentment, as well as an opportunity to achieve success regardless of the circumstances of one's birth or social status, hence nourishing the thought on American exceptionalism. This triad continues to permeate the American society and its popularity stems from the universal character of the standards it promotes, that is: the inalienable rights enshrined in *The Declaration of Independence*.

Hence, American leaders reiterate the themes of shared history, cultural roots, and joint effort. They also refer to national legacy: to the first settlers, to the Constitution, as well as to the States' turbulent history, which provides support for the assertion that the U.S. presidents derive their power from "the ideological arsenal of the past"⁷ which is utilised in order to lay stress on common bonds shared by the American people, further convincing them of their unity.

3. The linguistic manifestations of national ideology

What assures the power of the American Dream is "its ability to function as the dominant ideology of a large and complex society"⁸ basing on universal desires,

⁷ T. Todorov, *Imperfect Garden: The Legacy of Humanism*, (Trans. C. Cosman, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), p. 228.

⁸ J.L. Hochschild, *Facing Up to the American Dream. Race, Class, and the Soul of the Nation* (Princeton University Press: Princeton, New Jersey, 1995), p. 277.

common needs, and drives for self-development and contentment, which consequently allow to organise people around a concept powerful enough to shape the nation. Furthermore, the American Dream provides an idealised conception of the whole nation and its ethos in order to realise a shared social purpose, i.e. the construction of an ordered community. The inaugural addresses analysed lay special stress on communitarian approach and collectivism that require to think about the nation as a whole. The common purpose and collective effort to make the American Dream come true allow people to feel affiliated to something bigger or, as President Obama once said:

to find meaning in something greater than themselves.

Such an alluring promise likens the Dream to an organised religion, for not only does ideology unite people, but it also affects their consciousness, changing cognitive patterns associated with their adherence to a group. Thus, the ideological structure of the nation is driven by a powerful myth whose profound impact on societal norms and values becomes a tool of implicit suggestion or even social control by means of rhetorical constructs used for manipulation through the appeal to emotions, ambitions, and the need to belong.

The focus on unity and togetherness was first used by the Founding Fathers who identified the newly-created community as *we*, *the people* and, as a consequence, began the process of imprinting and stimulating necessity for fellowship. That is why the American presidents keenly referred to the national legacy, as well as appreciated the weight of the pronouns *we* and *us* which emphasise the state of being close to one another. Calling the people *America*, on the other hand, builds both their sense of nationhood and strength, as it refers to the country's history and multiple achievements. However, the key word in these speeches is *together*, which demonstrates that presidential rhetoric aims at building the sense of community and integration.

For the purpose of constructing a compelling and captivating discourse, the speakers utilise a wide range of political myths to paint more glittering images and present even more alluring visions of the land they inhabit. Following the proposition put forward by Edelman,⁹ who was the one to identify different types of political myths, American presidents make use of the "appeals to a 'good' legitimate power source ('God,' 'the people,' 'the nation,' etc.), appeals to history or historical mythology, the construction of a thoroughly Evil Other ([...] terrorists, etc.), and appeal for uniting behind a legitimate power source."¹⁰ Thus, the public speakers resort to the issues of racial integration and equality, to the perennial opposition between what carries positive and negative connotations or to recurring biblical

⁹ Edelman, Murray. *Constructing the Political Spectacle* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

¹⁰ J. Charteris-Black, *Politicians and Rhetoric: The Persuasive Power of Metaphor* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 26.

themes, like Kennedy who cites the command of Isaiah, which exhorts people to shake off what is unjust and unlawful, to object to what is enforced by terror or fear, and to unshackle themselves from anything that stops them from achieving their full potential:

undo the heavy burdens... (and) let the oppressed go free.

Then follows a passage from the Book of Romans, which states that people should be “rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation,” that whatever the future may bring them, they shall never give up their dreams and make strenuous efforts to succeed in spite of difficulties. An invocation to God for help and protection is yet another rhetorical strategy used by American Presidents to stir emotions; consequently, the speakers make several allusions to the Biblical chosen nation, to the vision of the promised land of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. For example, Clinton says:

Guided by the ancient vision of a promised land, let us set our sights upon a land of new promise.

The rhetoric of change permeates political discourse, with particular attention being paid to reforms, to personal and national development, as well as to economic growth. In his speech, Kennedy outlines his plans to:

explore the stars, conquer the deserts, eradicate disease, tap the ocean depths and encourage the arts and commerce.

And Carter postulates:

[...] I join in the hope that when my time as your President has ended, people might say this about our Nation: that (...) we had torn down the barriers that separated those of different race and region and religion, and where there had been mistrust, built unity, with a respect for diversity; that we had found productive work for those able to perform it.

Yet another example may be found in the inaugural address by Clinton who says that the American people are skilled reformers and that they constitute

a nation that fortifies the world’s most productive economy even as it protects the great natural bounty of our water, air, and majestic land.

Furthermore, the addressors of the speeches constantly remind the American people of their common hopes, bonds, and dreams, focusing on equal opportunities, wealthy families, and united community, as well as on the generations to follow and their future. All the speakers support the idea of a stronger America seen as an international leader and as a determined defender of peace and freedom across the globe. Carter says:

Our Nation can be strong abroad only if it is strong at home.

However, he refers not only to military power or stronger economy, but also to strength measured in terms of unwavering values held, as can be inferred from the following citation:

we will maintain strength so sufficient that it need not be proven in combat – a quiet strength based not merely on the size of an arsenal but on the nobility of ideas.

One can also trace similar patterns in Obama's inaugural address, with the difference that he makes explicit the issue of racial inequalities:

we say to you now that our spirit is stronger and cannot be broken [...] [and] "because we have tasted the bitter swill of civil war and segregation and emerged from that dark chapter stronger and more united.

When it comes to the analysis of figurative language, American presidents often apply the metaphor of journey – a common and easily understood source domain that implies an arrival to a desired destination, forward movement, and progress. In Clinton's speech, the metaphor is applied to talk about individual lives and the existence of the whole state:

For all of us are on that same journey of our lives, and our journey, too, will come to an end. But the journey of our America must go on.

A similar idea is present in Obama's address, in which it is said that Americans did not stop in their quest for the better life and that they simply refused to give up on the tenets of the American Dream:

Our journey has never been one of shortcuts or settling for less. It has not been the path for the fainthearted [...] Let it be said by our children's children that when we were tested, we refused to let this journey end.

The lexical markers detected include the already mentioned inclusive pronouns *we* and *us* that put emphasis on American togetherness, as well as repetitive directive forms beginning with *to let* which are intended to adumbrate firm actions to be taken by the community in the quest for a better future. Kennedy, for instance, attempts to encourage the people with the help of such directive uses of language in the following excerpts:

let the word go forth and let us go forth [...] let every nation know [...] let us begin anew.

One can also trace parallel constructions in Obama's speech, in the impactful lines which form a call to action:

let us remember [...] let us brave [...] let it be said.

Moreover, the public speakers understand the importance of binary oppositions and evocative nouns or adjectives of high rhetorical impact which help to paint vivid pictures. The inaugural address by Carter may serve as an illustration here: the president does not escape from using nouns which carry negative value, such as *weakness*, *ignorance*, *failure* or *death*, but presents them only in order to provide a direct contrast for the positive ones: for *strength*, *wisdom*, *success*, *life*, and for many others. Another good example of how he utilises the binary opposition system throughout his speech are multiple units of language defined in reciprocal determination with one another, e.g. *changing* and *unchanging*, *the weak* and *the powerful*, *the rich* and *the poor*.

He sets side by side words of positive connotation with lexical items that activate negative associations with a view to representing the comprehensive picture of the world and an all-inclusive character of his intended policy.

As far as the quantitative analysis in terms of lexicon is concerned, the orators usually place primacy on different concepts, some choosing *the world*, *the century*, or *strength* as their leading key words. Although messages conveyed tend to vary in terms of lexical items used, the reference to the notions of *the nation* and *America* or what is *American* logically receives most emphasis. Other significant lexical units of analysis are the words *all* and *new*, the former pointing out to the comprehensive character of a given group and promoting an attitude of inclusiveness, the latter triggering positive associations with change and freshness. The inaugural address by Kennedy comprises multiple references to the theme of novelty:

“a new generation of Americans,” “a new alliance for progress,” [and] “creating a new endeavor, not a new balance of power, but a new world of law.”

When it comes to the leitmotif of inclusiveness, it can be traced in the speech delivered by Carter, in the following fragments:

“a new spirit among us all” [and] “the well-being of all people.”

In the author’s opinion, the abovementioned citations serve as representative examples of presidential rhetoric herein analysed, showing a general rhetorical pattern used by Democratic presidents of the United States. The results of analyses of the selected speeches are correlational since all the inaugural addresses deal with similar themes and tropes, whose primary objective is to gain the attention of the audience, as well as to stir up confluent emotional states. Although all the inaugural addresses taken into consideration have in view the sustainment of the ideology of the American Dream, the explicit reference to dreaming or a dream appeared only in the speeches delivered by Carter and Clinton: the former says:

the bold and brilliant dream [...] awaits its consummation.

Whereas the latter refers to Martin Luther King’s dream which epitomises the American Dream in general.

4. Reproducing identity patterns through language use

Surely, there is a hidden agenda behind the practices described – behind the practices that serve the construction of the American national identity, for the Dream, in fact, is the mechanism of control and objectification of national identity as it surreptitiously gives the people an authoritative instruction to submit to one vision of an American citizen. The strategy of telling this myth exploits the subliminal idea of Americanness which affects the collective mind because “the great national sugges-

tion begins with the psychological, historical, and institutional supports for continued belief in the American Dream¹¹ that subsequently anchors in the very subconscious of the crowd's popular mind and "projects shared social beliefs."¹² This act of projection leads to the replication of collective behaviour and defines the very sense of identity of the citizens, persuading them to adopt identical American mind-frame. The way the idea is marketed and delivered to the nation is often claimed to monopolise the ideological space concerning nationhood and selfhood, concentrating on a belief being instilled into the minds of the audience, which creates common social identity. As such, the Dream serves not only the creation of communal ties, but may rather be perceived as a social project intended to impose conformism upon the whole society owing to the creation of an effective system of self-control which rests on culture. As a direct outcome, "individual behaviour may be conditioned by expectations of the surrounding culture."¹³ Although the concept of an individual identity is incorporated into the ethos of Americanness, it actually feeds people one common pattern to apply. With the myth acting as a psychological basis for the nation's integration, filling the people with lust for becoming one of the dreamers, it seems reasonable to ask why this cultural projection influences one's identity.

The citizens exposed to the ideology and the concomitant psychological phenomena become subjects to cultural conditioning and external control that artificially impose generalised, iconic tenets upon the nation. Therefore, the Dream transforms into an efficient tool used to mould the public opinion and provide the definition of what constitutes common social behaviour and selfhood. The myth becomes the origin from which common principles, as well as moral and behavioural standards can be obtained. It turns into a construct similar to the Great Stereopticon, a "[...] machine to project selected pictures of life in the hope that what is seen will be imitated."¹⁴ The main objective of interpretation of speech acts on the psychological level is to understand how the application of linguistic and paralinguistic elements can contribute to the sustainment and reproduction of the vision of the self,¹⁵ as well as how the speaker can construct his communicational intent to influence the audience.

As regards language itself, it is essential to apprehend the power of words that most often serve strictly persuasive goals, providing various stimuli to the popular

¹¹ Hochschild, *Facing Up to the American Dream. Race, Class, and the Soul of the Nation*, p. 26.

¹² Charteris-Black, *Politicians and Rhetoric: The Persuasive Power of Metaphor*, p. 2.

¹³ S. Hirschberg and T. Hirschberg, *Arguing Across the Disciplines: a Rhetoric and Reader* (New York: Pearson Longman, 2007), p. 126.

¹⁴ R.M. Weaver, *Ideas Have Consequences: Expanded Edition*. Google Books.

<https://books.google.pl/books?id=eQgGAQAAQBAJ&pg=PA94&dpq=PA94&dq=weather+great+stereopticon&source=bl&ots=Kt470tP9W&sig=iU7Z4zSN2taLGa1M1ySQHWLq2BM&hl=pl&csa=X&ved=0CDgQ6AEwA2oVChMIqO2G8YOQyQIV4p9yCh0gHwSy#v=onepage&q=weather%20great%20stereopticon&cf=false> (November 14, 2015), p. 85.

¹⁵ A. Duranti, *Linguistic Anthropology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 228.

mind. This theory rests on the postulate that where language and culture meet, they may serve as the instruments of expedient rhetoric which may, in fact, put an end to really independent selves if they blindly initiate behaviour congruent with the requirements of the engineers of this ideological machinery. When culture requires conformity with “noble” values promoted by a leading ideology, be it the American Dream or else, one’s identity as a citizen becomes a reproduction of a common pattern, allowing little time to think or analyse, making people act without proper consideration of the consequences. Therefore, continuous cultivation of the national myth is used for strictly social ends as it alters the most personal aspects of human identity and activity, subjecting them to a set of behavioural clichés, which can be perceived as an attempt at restraining individuality and unbiased assessment due to strong psychological and social pressure. With the purpose of tightening its grip on an individual being, the system assumes control of the people by means of the national story narrated by the political leaders, shaping reality owing to the great American myth.

That being the case, one shall remember that rhetoric is the art of practical language use, that discourse should be studied as a social practice because of its centrality in the social life. The main findings of this research pertain to rhetoric’s covert impact on the addressees, aimed at changing their frame of mind so as to make them open to suggestive argumentation. Being firmly embedded in sociolinguistic and pragmalinguistic domain, presidential rhetoric effectively constructs national identity. The impact of the American Dream is twofold, for it builds the sense of a unified community and, at the same time, condemns an individual to anonymity within a collection of other people who behave, think, and believe alike. Not only does it shape thought patterns and correspondingly weaves the fabric of reality along with the American “social-personality,”¹⁶ but also fosters the reinforcement of collectivism at the expense of individualism, propelling the people into commitment and increasing their conformability.

Conclusion

What can be reasonably inferred from the following study is that the American reality is submerged in the rhetoric of the American Dream that performs the key role as a great community project reliant on the symbiotic relationship between lan-

¹⁶ W.B. Swann, Jr. and J.K. Bosson, “Self and Identity” in: *Handbook of Social Psychology, Volume 1*, eds. S.T. Fiske, D.T. Gilbert, and G. Lindzey (Google Books. <https://books.google.pl/books?id=W3aznFeYHc8C&pg=PA30&lpg=PA30&dq=psychology+manipulation+thesis&source=bl&ots=ON2AhTE6OO&sig=BJFBXXkV1XwpYHFsqfHIXrXNJJo&hl=pl&sa=X&ei=cVLcVO2VIJTsaMuIgdAN&ved=0CFgQ6AEwCTgK#v=onepage&q=psychology%20manipulation%20thesis&f=false>, May 9, 2015), p. 589.

guage, culture, and society. The study of speeches pertaining to this traditional cultural ideology enables us to discover how wonderful machine the American Dream is and to realise that it plays a leading part in the process of the dynamic formation of the State. Taking the social dimension of discourse analysis into consideration, it can be said that the myth of the American Dream has become something more than a traditional element of political rhetoric; rather, it transformed into what Cullen calls *political religion*¹⁷ – a belief that tunes the collective state of mind, persuading people to adopt specific attitudinal pose and thus turn into the American mass mind. Such processes are not reserved for the American Dream only, but may pertain to any other ideology whose almost spiritual beliefs and values, accepted by the whole nation as the ultimate standard, open space for manipulation through subjection of people to a system of illusions.

Therefore, one should be conscious of the fact that public discourse is a tool in designing and perpetuating cultural, all-pervasive myths which can help to justify and exercise political power over the audience. As public speakers draw from the perennial interaction between language, culture, and community, they are actually framing their speeches to present some particular perspective on the world,¹⁸ providing the recipients of their messages with powerful stimuli shaping cognition. As a result, such speeches do not spotlight the citizens' features or identity but rather create them, thus transforming the audience into perfect people invested with a particular, amenable identity.

In conclusion, the pivotal role of government and mass media in creating the cult of the American Dream or any other national ethos shall neither be trivialised, nor ignored because of its considerable impact on the society, its lifestyle, and thought patterns. When an idea becomes an instrument for manipulating human thought, it changes into propaganda. Thus, it turns out that national ideology attempts to mould the public mind, denying an individual the right to self-definition and depriving him of the chance to think independently. This surely encourages to rethink the nature and functions of the American Dream – a myth proven to be one of the most remarkable and effective socio-cultural phenomena of humankind.

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¹⁷ J. Cullen, *The American Dream: A Short History of an Idea That Shaped a Nation* (Oxford, New York [etc.]: Oxford University Press, 2003) https://books.google.pl/books?id=yM96DK4ELZkC&redir_esc=y (September 24, 2015), p. 87.

¹⁸ Duranti, *Linguistic Anthropology*, p. 195.

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